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Catholic Relief Services Develops MRE Materials

Since its formation in 1943, Catholic Relief Services has followed their mission to help impoverished and disadvantaged people overseas. This article discusses how CRS successfully implemented a mine risk education project that has decreased the number of incidents involving landmines and explosive remnants of war in heavily contaminated districts of Vietnam. As a direct result of the project, CRS's MRE curriculum has been accepted by the provincial Department of Education and integrated with primary level public school curricula.

by Ta Thi Hai Yen [Catholic Relief Services]

Three decades after the end of the Vietnam War, many Vietnamese provinces continue to suffer from the consequences of landmines and explosive remnants of war.¹ Quang Tri province, located on the North Central coast of Vietnam, is one of the most heavily contaminated areas in the country. Responding to the need unexploded ordnance and mine risk education, Catholic Relief Services initiated an MRE project for children in primary school in early 2001. At the time of development, official MRE textbooks were unavailable in Vietnam.

CRS employed seven writers, including five education experts from the Ministry of Education and Training and the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences, as well as two experts from the Education and Training Department of Quang Tri province, to develop and write relevant MRE materials. Writers were chosen based on their experience and expertise in the following areas:

- Development of materials for the primary school age level
- Activity-based methodology
- Participatory development of materials
- Teacher training experience

Although UXO contamination is an extensive problem in Vietnam, MRE remains undeveloped. To increase awareness, the selected writers participated in an MRE workshop conducted by Barbara Lewis, an international consultant from World Education's UXO Survivor program in Laos. UXO education in Laos is extensive and was developed based on international MRE standards. The workshop provided the writers with knowledge about landmine/UXO issues in Indochinese countries, the history of the UXO Awareness Education (Consortium/Lao PDR) textbooks and their underlying methodol-

ogy, and international guidelines for UXO and ERW materials. The CRS writers used the previously mentioned list specifically for developing MRE materials. The workshop provided an MRE model—developed and tested in Laos—and international guidelines that should be followed during the process of developing materials. The assessment in Quang Tri province provided increased understanding of the landmine/UXO problem and its impact on the affected areas.

In addition to the workshop, the writers visited Quang Tri province for three days. They met with different authorities at the commune, district and provincial levels; visited schools and local households; and were exposed to the province's UXO problem and its unique personal, social and economic impact on the area. These visits increased awareness by exposing the writers to the reality of the current situation and were critical to the development of appropriate and internationally recognized materials.

MRE Primary School Curriculum

From December 2001 to March 2002, the writing team, with the support and coordination of CRS, developed MRE materials. These MRE materials target all children between the ages of six and 12, who are currently in grades 1–5. The degree of difficulty and complexity of the MRE materials increase at each grade level. The materials are activity-based, heavily illustrated and are relayed by teachers through storytelling and brainstorming exercises. The stories and content within the MRE materials are tailored to reflect real-life instances within the different towns and villages. The materials are based on the following five principles:

General knowledge of landmines/UXO. The teachers instruct children on general information about landmines and



Figure 1: Map of U.S. bombing data in Vietnam and Laos.
Figure courtesy of author/CISR.

UXO. All MRE messages are concise, instructive and written so that children may easily read and understand them. This information includes common shapes and sizes of landmines/UXO and information about the danger posed by old, rusty ordnance even years after a war. Primary schoolchildren are not taught to specifically identify landmines/UXO, because they are naturally curious and the desire to identify ordnance may cause them to purposely get close to or touch them.

Incidents. The teachers educate children on specific actions that can result in an incident. These actions include touching, kicking or throwing stones at ordnance and/or attempting to dismantle landmines/UXO. Swimming in craters or entering areas designated with warning signs can also be very dangerous. In addition, building fires directly on the ground could trigger an explosion, because some UXO are heat-sensitive.

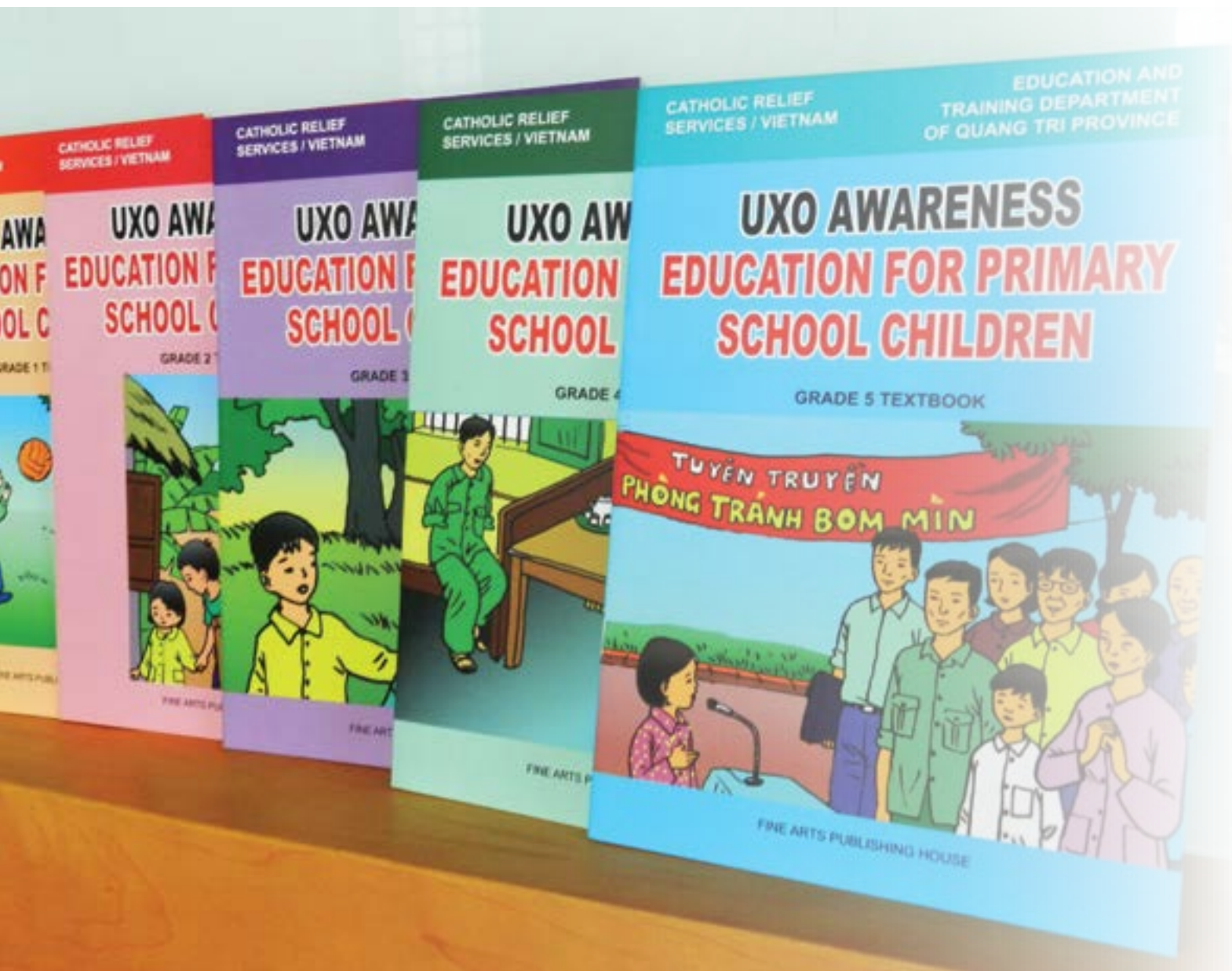
Prevention. To prevent incidents, teachers instruct children not to touch ordnance they find. They teach them to re-

member where they found the ordnance in relation to its surrounding area and to alert an adult (teacher, parent or police) of the location.

Implications of incidents. The provided MRE materials describe the physical, mental and social effects a landmine/UXO victim may suffer. Incidents not only affect the injured but also their families and communities. With this information, children better understand the severity of incidents and the importance of prevention.

Disability sensitivity. The MRE materials also address appropriate behavior toward persons with disabilities. Included in the materials are stories of how UXO survivors overcame injuries to become contributing members of their communities.

Using these MRE materials, CRS-Vietnam has provided MRE in Quang Tri province since 2001, in Quang Binh province since 2007 and in Quang Nam province since 2010. The Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S.



A set of five MRE textbooks produced by CRS.
Photo courtesy of Nguyen Thi Huong Thuy/CRS.

Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) began funding the program in 2006, allowing it to expand into additional high-risk areas. CRS trained a cumulative total of more than 43,475 children and 66,464 teachers, parents and community members in eight districts, which contributed to a declining rate of landmine/UXO casualties in targeted areas.² School-based MRE was introduced at the primary level and successfully improved child awareness and behavior. Behavioral changes and fewer casualties were documented through evaluations, post-testing and data gathered by participating communities.³

The CRS primary-school MRE curriculum went through many editions and is now widely accepted by the provincial

Department of Education. As a result, the Quang Binh and Quang Tri provinces' local Departments of Education and Training have integrated the CRS MRE materials into 20 percent of their overall curriculum, which is determined by the local culture, geography and students' primary needs. The other 80 percent of the curriculum in the provinces is considered the compulsory national curriculum, which the national government determines.

Effectiveness of the CRS MRE Resources

In previous CRS project communities, no child who received MRE was killed or injured by incidents involving landmines/UXO, and adult casualty rates dropped by as much as

50 percent. Previous project communities include the Trieu Phong and Gio Linh districts of Quang Tri province and the Tuyen Hoa and Minh Hoa districts of Quang Binh province.

Clear Path International provided reports on landmine/UXO casualty rates, which indicated that the trend in UXO incidents decreased from 2005 through the first five months of 2011.² The rate of accidents in primary school-aged children reduced dramatically. Throughout the five-year period, 14–18 year olds represented a significant percentage of casualties for those under age 18. In Quang Tri province, eight children in this age group were injured or killed, accounting for roughly 23 percent of the casualties in Vietnam during 2005.^{2,3} Since then, child casualties decreased—only four children were killed or injured in 2009. From 3 December 2012 to 2 January 2013, however, 12 children were killed/injured (five dead/seven injured) due to old mortars and bombs, indicating that landmines, UXO and ERW still heavily impact Vietnam.⁴

The CRS approach of targeting specific at-risk groups proved effective in reaching all sectors of the community, as demonstrated through increased knowledge, awareness and behavior regarding MRE among students and community members. In the PM/WRA 2010–2011 grant, a 10 percent sample of students who participated in the project were selected for testing prior to and after implementation of the MRE training.^{5,6} The comparative results of pre- and post-tests indicate that the in-school training increased the level of UXO understanding and accident prevention among students. The most recent progress report in May 2011 showed that, as a result of the CRS in-school MRE training, the percentage of students aware of what landmines/UXO look like, how accidents happen, how to avoid these incidents and the effects incidents have on victims and their families increased significantly, from 24 to 62 percent, in the Le Thuy district of Quang Binh province. ©

See endnotes page 66



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News Brief

Geneva Call Launches First ANSA Database

In November 2012 Geneva Call launched "Their Words," an information database. The database provides published commitments and internal rules and regulations of armed non-state actors. Issues such as the protection of children and civilian populations, the use of anti-personnel mines and compliance with the Geneva Convention are made public and accessible.

The publication of commitments and rules written by and for ANSAs is intended to encourage other non-state actors to enact and follow regulations that ensure the protection of civilian populations. The database provides examples in various contexts of how these codes can be created and implemented. For example, the Syrian rebellion seeks to create a code of conduct for its current efforts. The database provides the means for the Syrian rebels to research codes of conduct and take examples from other ANSAs.

The database is organized by topic/theme and geographic location of ANSAs. To access the database, use the following link: <http://theirwords.org/pages/home>.



~ Paige Ober, CISR staff

Catholic Relief Services Develops MRE Materials by Yen [from page 42]

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